

**Writing 500:  
Community Literacies and Writing: Theory, Research, and Practice  
Fall 2022**

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Instructor: Logan Middleton  
Please Call Me: Logan (Pronouns: He/Him)

Class Location: Gregory Hall 120  
Mondays: 2.00p-5.00p

**Course Description:**

Each of us moves in, out, and through communities in our everyday lives. And of course, each of these communities is home to own collection of situated literacy practices. But what even are communities? What are community literacies? And given the (possible) unstable and nebulous characteristics of these concepts, how can we identify, research, and enact literate activity within communities in ways that promote justice?

This advanced undergraduate / graduate seminar will examine these questions from a host of writing studies scholarship as it relates to community literacy theories, pedagogies, and methodologies. Drawing from topics including translanguaging, anarchist traditions, coding, transnational Black fashion, abolition, Indigenous Studies, and decolonial work—and located in sites ranging from writing centers, queer migration activist groups, and scenes of #BlackLivesMatter organizing to bilingual afterschool programs and prisons—we will work together to understand how communities leverage literate, linguistic, and rhetorical resources to get things done in everyday contexts.

By studying this broad range of spaces, we stand to make sense of the complex identities, politics, and cultures that comprise communities as well as to better comprehend the myriad purposes for which they organize and act. Along the way, we'll develop pragmatic capacities for community-oriented teaching and research while also developing our own senses of belonging (and engagement with) our local communities.

**Student Learning Outcomes for Community Literacies and Writing:**

After completing this course, students will be (better) able to:

- 1.) Articulate—and locate productive tensions within—definitions of “community” and “community literacies” based on course readings and lived experience
- 2.) Understand how literate activity is mobilized across community spaces for a wide variety of purposes, goals, and aims

- 3.) Comprehend how complex relationships between institutions, communities, and institutions of hegemonic power shape not only literacy practices but also notions of language, culture, race, ethnicity, and identity.
- 4.) Develop and refine community literacy approaches to research, teaching, composing, publishing, and program administration
- 5.) Write with community members in order to produce academic and public-facing texts about issues that matter to students and their communities.

### **Major Course Assignments**

**\*Community Literacy Narrative:** This assignment tasks you to consider the literate practices of communities you feel you're a part of. In four to five pages, you'll be asked to (a) describe what community or communities you're taking up in this narrative, (b) describe their collective literacy practices, and (c) how these community literacy practices operate in relation to flows of power.

**\*Community Partner Exploration:** In this assignment, you'll be asked to profile a community partner—a nonprofit, collective, or other organization—doing community-based work. In addition to outlining their aims, strategies, tactics for community engagement, you'll be tasked with conducting either a power-mapping or needs analysis exercise as related to your community partner of choice. These genres will be discussed in class.

**\*Homework:** Seven times over the course of the semester, you'll be required to submit homework in the form of “blurbs,” each about one page in length, in which you answer one to three questions about the week's reading(s).

I describe these responses as blurbs because I envision them as relatively unstructured, low-stakes, free-flowing, journal-style responses to what we're reading in class. I also call these responses blurbs—and deliberately avoid calling them “reading responses,” “response papers,” “reading reflections,” or other similar terms—because (a) I don't see them as formal as papers and (b) genres of writing with these names often present vague and nebulous guidelines for students.

As such, I'm only interested in your reflections on these questions for this homework. And as noted above, you only need to complete seven blurbs over the semester, so if there are readings that don't stand out to you or ones that you don't want to write about, you don't have to.

**\*Final Project:** More information about this final project will be released toward the semester's end. What you will produce, however, will be intended to be something useful to you as you (continue to) explore community literacies: theoretically, methodologically, or pedagogically.

## **Grading Policy**

This class uses a modified version of labor-based contract grading to review and holistically assess your work. This system of assessment, which is fleshed out in greater detail on a separate handout, operates from the understanding that learning always requires labor. While putting time and energy into course assignments doesn't always yield "successful" work—satisfying writing genre requirements, fulfilling all of the assignment criteria, etc.—labor-based contract grading seeks to honor individual effort put into learning. That is to say, you will be evaluated in this course based on your work and what you choose to complete as opposed to the actual content of your submissions.

While this might seem like a "participation trophy" approach to grading and evaluation, I believe that this research-supported approach to assessment is beneficial for a number of reasons. It's my hope that this system will allow you to focus on learning in this course as opposed to being overly guided by evaluation and assessment—the likes of which I believe often overtake learning as primary goals of education in university spaces. In addition, contract grading affords you opportunities to take risks and play with new ideas as a writer and learner throughout what will be a logistically challenging and experimental semester. From my perspective, this system also helps me, as an instructor, focus my efforts on responding to you, your writing, and what you're trying to do in your work as opposed to evaluating it for a letter grade.

Though I've tried to make this grading process as transparent as possible elsewhere, please don't hesitate to ask me questions through our correspondence if you are ever unclear about my expectations or your work. If I'm concerned about the work you're submitting, I will let you know.

## **Statement on Communities and Identities:**

Even as we're learning at a distance, you will undoubtedly be working and in community with students who differ from you in terms of identity, whether that's in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, document status, sexuality, nationality, language background, age, ability, neurodiversity, and beyond. Regardless of these differences, you must absolutely respect the attitudes and contributions of your classmates, even if their perspectives differ from your own. As such, cisheterosexist, racist, ableist, homophobic, transphobic, and/or xenophobic writing or actions will not be tolerated, nor will any additional form of harassment. These attitudes, while sometimes borne out of genuine ignorance, are not only counterproductive to learning but they're simply unacceptable and have no place in our learning space—much less anywhere else. Please be respectful of your peers' contributions to class and their work, as we will all be working together through correspondence to promote a rich learning environment to the extent that we can.

Should we encounter material that might be emotionally challenging or potentially traumatic, I will provide a content warning in advance. If you find yourself having difficulty dealing with a particular class topic or reading, feel free to disengage with the material and, if comfortable, try to let me know about it through correspondence.

### **Access Statement:**

Everyone learns differently and benefits from different kinds of support. Please feel free to reach out how best you can if you would like to discuss your individual learning style and/or needs and how this course can best accommodate them, whether you have a disability or not. Participating in a correspondence course is, for me and possibly for you, a new way to learn. So please do whatever you need—and communicate those needs to me if you feel comfortable doing so—to feel supported in your learning throughout this semester.

### **Language Statement:**

The ways in which people are socialized into White Mainstream English and Academic English—both language varieties that are largely promoted unquestioningly in academia—are often violent, damaging processes for multilingual and non-multilingual individuals alike. As such, I'm open to and encouraging of student work that represents or draws upon your full linguistic repertoires. That is to say, if you know multiple languages or codes or slang and want to use them, I want you to know that I wholeheartedly support this decision-making and writing work. If there's anything I can do to be more supportive of your language needs, please do let me know me so I can better support you. At any point in the semester, feel free to ask me about how I'd respond to work that isn't communicated in ways that are traditionally valued in university or educational spaces.

### **Statement on Multimodality and Genre:**

We'll discuss this a bit later in the semester, but I recognize that we make meaning beyond just words; we do so through image, video, sound, gesture, and other means in addition to written and spoken language. As such, you're not required to complete the work for this course through \*just\* written language or any sort of standardized genre format unless otherwise specified. You're welcome to write creatively, journalistically, doodle, illustrate your answers, or answer assignment questions through any means you can so long as you respond to them in full.

### **Tentative Course Schedule / Reading Guide**

#### **Week I: Theorizing Literacy**

- Excerpts from Richardson, *African American Literacies* (2003)

- Excerpts from Ruiz and Sánchez, *Decolonizing Rhetoric and Composition Studies: New Latinx Keywords for Theory and Pedagogy* (2016)
- Excerpts from Royster, *Traces of a Stream: Literacy and Social Change among African American Women* (2000)
- Excerpts from Young, *Your Average N\*\*\*\*: Performing Race, Literacy, and Masculinity* (2007)

## **Week II: Theorizing Community**

- Excerpts from Fisher, *Black Literate Lives: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (2009)
- Excerpts from Flower, *Community Literacy and the Rhetoric of Public Engagement* (2008)
- Excerpts from González, Moll, and Amanti, *Funds of Knowledge: Theorizing Practices in Households, Communities, and Classrooms* (2005)
- Excerpts from Prior, “Are Communities of Practice Really an Alternative to Discourse Communities?” (2003)

## **Week III: Community Literacy: Case Studies I**

- Excerpts from Cintron, *Angels' Town: Chero Ways, Gang Life, and Rhetorics of the Everyday* (1997)
- Excerpts from Sheridan, *Girls, Feminism, and Grassroots Literacies: Activism in the GirlZone* (2009)

## **Week IV: Community Literacy: Case Studies II**

- Excerpts from Alvarez, *Brokering Tareas: Mexican Immigrant Families Translanguaging Homework Literacies* (2017)
- Excerpts from Gonzales, *Sites of Translation: What Multilinguals Can Teach Us About Digital Writing and Rhetoric* (2018)

## **Week V: Teaching in / with Community Spaces**

- Excerpts from Alvarez, *Community Literacies en Confianza: Learning From Bilingual Afterschool Programs* (2017)

- Excerpts from Haworth, *Anarchist Pedagogies: Collective Actions, Theories, and Critical Reflections on Education* (2012)
- Excerpts from Paris and Alim, *Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies: Teaching and Learning for Justice in a Changing World* (2017)

### **Week VI: Researching in / with Community Spaces**

- Irizarry and Brown, “Humanizing Research in Dehumanizing Spaces: The Challenges and Opportunities of Conducting Participatory Action Research with Youth in Schools” (2013)
- Excerpts from Patel, *Decolonizing Educational Research: From Ownership to Answerability* (2016)

### **Week VII: Administrative Work in / with Community Spaces**

- Doggart, Tedrowe, and Vieira, “Minding the Gap: Realizing Our Ideal Community Writing Center” (2007)
- Goldblatt, “Alinsky’s Reveille: A Community-Organizing Model for Neighborhood-Based Literacy Projects” (2005)
- Shumake and Wendler Shah, “Reciprocity and Power Dynamics: Community Members Grading Students” (2017)

### **Week VIII: Revisiting Community / University Relationships**

- Boggs et al., “Abolitionist University Studies: An Invitation” (2019)
- Excerpts from Harney and Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study. Minor Compositions* (2013)

### **Week IX: Co-Writing with Communities**

- Barrett et al., “‘More than Transformative’: A New View of Prison Writing Narratives” (2019)
- Bloom-Pojar, Anderson, and Pilloff, “Community-Based Writing with Latinx Rhetorics in Milwaukee” (2019)

### **Week X: Co-Publishing with Communities**

- Excerpts from Mathieu, Parks, and Rousculp, *Circulating Communities: The Tactics and Strategies of Community Publishing* (2011)

### **Week XI: Community Literacy: Case Studies III**

- Byrd, ““Between Learning and Opportunity: A Study of African American Adult Coders’ Networks of Support”
- Excerpts from Pritchard, *Fashioning Lives: Black Queers and the Politics of Literacy* (2016)
- Sackey, Ridolfo, and DeVoss, “Making Space in Lansing, Michigan: Communities and/in Circulation” (2018)

### **Week XII: Community Literacy: Case Studies IV**

- Excerpts from Ford, *Liberated Threads: Black Women, Style, and the Global Politics of Soul* (2017)
- Tuck, “Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities” (2009)

### **Week XIII: Community Literacy and Activist Futures**

- Pittendrigh, “Making Visible Invisible Suffering: Non-Deliberative Agency and the Rhetoric of Tamms Prisoners” (2015)
- Richardson and Ragland, “#StayWoke: The Language and Literacies of the #BlackLivesMatter Movement” (2018)

### **Week XIV: Toward Coalition**

- Chávez, *Queer Migration Politics: Activist Rhetoric and Coalitional Possibilities* (2013)
- Excerpts from Davis, *Freedom is a Constant Struggle: Foundations of a Movement* (2016)

## Course Bibliography

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Bloom-Pojar, Rachel, Julia Anders, and Storm Pilloff. “*Reflections: A Journal of Writing, Service-Learning, and Community Literacy*, vol. 18, no. 2, 2019, pp. 36-65.

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Chávez, Karma R. *Queer Migration Politics: Activist Rhetoric and Coalitional Possibilities*. University of Illinois Press, 2013.

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- Richardson, Elaine. *African American Literacies*. Routledge, 2003.
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